

Name of Practice: VOLUNTARY SMALL ACREAGE GRAZING SYSTEM  
DCR Specifications for No. VSL-6A

This document specifies terms and conditions for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's voluntary small acreage grazing systems best management practice that are applicable to all contracts entered into with respect to that practice.

A. Description and Purpose

To reduce soil erosion in pastures and prevent those areas exposed to heavy livestock traffic from experiencing excessive manure and soil losses due to the destruction of ground cover, and eliminate direct access to, or a direct runoff input to live streams where there is a defined water quality problem.

Small acreage grazing systems frequently require the use of a heavy use area to remove livestock from pastures in wet conditions or when the pastures need to rest and recover. These sacrifice area paddocks quickly become denuded of vegetation and may harbor undesirable plants. Conditions in these paddocks are often unfavorable to livestock as well as the surrounding environment due to the build-up of manure in the paddock and the erosion that may take place on denuded soil.

The intent of this practice is to prevent manure and sediment runoff from a heavy use area and pastures from entering watercourses and to capture a portion of the manure as a resource for other uses such as fertilizer. This is accomplished by dividing the pasture into grazing paddocks. Livestock is rotated from paddock to paddock as is necessary to maintain a permanent vegetative cover. One lot is stabilized and designated as a heavy use area for use in periods of wet weather and when the grass in the grazing paddocks needs to rest and re-grow to the appropriate grazing height.

B. Policies and Specifications

1. This Best Management Practice (BMP) cannot compensate for over stocking. A stocking rate of no greater than two (2) animal units (1,000-pound equivalent) per acre must be maintained throughout the life span of the practice.
2. A grazing management plan, practice design, and operation and maintenance (O & M) plan are to be developed with consultation from a VCE Agent specializing in the alternative livestock (if available) and NRCS and/or District.
3. A minimum of three grassed grazing paddocks is required.
4. A heavy use area is required.
  - i. Manure, hay, bedding, and other organic materials must be removed from the sacrifice area at intervals outlined in the operation and maintenance

- plan. The sacrifice area must be maintained in a sanitary condition that does not allow for the accumulation of manure or the creation of mud.
- ii. The sacrifice area should be sized to allow 600 to 1,000 square feet per animal unit (1,000-lb. equivalent). Consideration should be given to the age, sex, breed, and behavioral characteristics of the animals when determining the final size and number of sacrifice areas needed. The heavy use area shall be sloped not to exceed 10% maximum.
  - iii. Divert surface water and roof runoff away from the sacrifice area.
  - iv. Provide filtering of runoff from the heavy use area.
  - v. The primary use of the heavy use area shall be within the purpose of establishing a small acreage grazing system. Design considerations shall not be given to its use as a riding or exercise area or any purpose other than to perform its water quality benefit.
- 5. Each grassed grazing paddock will be sized based on soil type, topography and herd size and be maintained in at least 80% coverage of permanent forage.
  - 6. Livestock must be excluded from all streams. A minimum 35-ft.wide vegetated buffer shall be maintained directly adjacent to all streams, ponds, and other watercourses.
  - 7. Walkways may be installed to facilitate herd movement from the barn to the heavy use area and grazing paddocks. Walkways are to be designed in accordance with NRCS standard 575 (Animal Trails and Walkways).
  - 8. In order for the forage in the grass paddocks to take up nutrients such as nitrogen it must be managed for growth and harvested for hay or pasture.
  - 9. Critical eroding and sensitive areas will be fenced out and permanent cover established.
  - 10. An animal waste management system plan shall be developed as required by NRCS standard 561-Heavy Use Protection. The nutrient management plan shall address all the acreage on the participant farms where manure will be applied. The nutrient management plan shall be implemented and maintained for the life of the practice.
  - 11. Producers must be fully implementing a current Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) on all agricultural production acreage contained within the field that this practice will be implemented on. The NMP must comply with all requirements set forth in the Nutrient Management Training and Certification Regulations, (4VAC50-85 et seq.) and the Virginia Nutrient Management Standards and Criteria (revised July 2014), must be prepared and certified by a Virginia certified nutrient management planner, and must be on file with the local District. Plans shall also contain any specific production management criteria designated in the BMP practice (4VACV50-85-130G).

12. The practice must not be in lifespan from any other conservation program.
13. This practice is subject to the requirements of applicable NRCS Standards. These may include 561 Heavy Use Area Protection, 342 Critical Area Planting, 362 Diversion, 575 Trails and Walkways, 391 Riparian Herbaceous Cover, 393 Filter Strip, 412 Grassed Waterway, 516 Pipeline, 528 Prescribed Grazing, 558 Roof Runoff Structures 574 Spring Development, 580 Stream bank and Shoreline Protection, and 614 Watering Facilities.
14. All practice components implemented should be maintained for a minimum of 5 years following the calendar year of installation. The lifespan begins on Jan. 1 of the calendar year following the year of implementation. This practice is subject to spot check by the District throughout the lifespan of the practice.

C. Technical Responsibility

Technical and administrative responsibility is assigned to qualified technical DCR and District staff in consultation, where appropriate and based on the controlling standard, with DCR, Virginia Certified Nutrient Management Planner(s), NRCS, DOF, and VCE. Individuals certifying technical need and technical practice installation shall have appropriate certifications as identified above and/or Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA) for the designed and installed component(s). All practices are subject to spot check procedures and any other quality control measures.

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